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AUTHOR Mattox, Robert J.; Hurt, David J.
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ABSTRACT

Listening is an extremely important dimension of a counselor's vocational life. The counselor is constantly involved in the process of listening. Verbal and nonverbal messages sent by clients must be received, interpreted, and organized. Counselors need to be active in listening to clients and critical in their analysis of the messages being transmitted. Feedback is an important attribute of active listening, allowing the listener to monitor his/her communication with others and avoid misunderstandings. This paper presents an effective listening exercise and suggests ways that counselors can train themselves and assist prospective counselors with the use of listening as a skill. Recent research on the listening habits of clients and counselors is also presented. Discussions are included on how misinterpretation affects relationships, early learning and its effects on listening, active listening, and gender differences in listening. The issue of proxemics, the personal cultural spatial needs of individuals, is addressed, and the differences in how individuals take in and send out information auditorily, visually, and kinesthetically are considered. (NB)

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COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS:
LISTENING FROM THE COUNSELOR'S PERSPECTIVE

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by
Robert J. Mattox, Asst. Prof.
and
David J. Hurt, Assoc. Prof.
Division of Counselor Education
and Rehabilitation Programs
Emporia State University
Emporia, Kansas

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Listening is the receiving of oral stimuli. Listening is far more complex than just hearing sounds. Hearing is a natural function which we can perform unless we suffer a physical loss. In everyday life we are generally very selective in our listening. We tend to listen well to the oral messages that best fit our needs and values at a particular time. How many times have you heard a song and not been able to repeat the words to the song. The music attracted your attention and not the words that were sung. We organize the sounds that we hear into meaningful units through the interpretation of the oral stimuli that are presented to us.

A fundamental component of communication is listening. Research indicates that we spend considerable time involved in the process of listening (Rankin, 1926; Weinrauch and Swanda, 1974; Werner, 1975). The samples used in these studies showed that individuals spend from 33% to 55% of their time listening. If these studies were replicated today we would probably see a larger percentage of time spent in listening activities because of the changes in mass communications.

Unfortunately, few people are good listeners. If listening is such a large part of every-day life why are we such poor listeners? "Even at the purely informational level, researchers claim that 75% of oral communication is ignored, misunderstood, or quickly forgotten" (Bolton, 1979). Nichols and Stevens (1957) found that people appear to recall about one-half of what they have heard. Retesting two months later indicates that people only recall about one fourth of what they heard. People tend to be even poorer listeners when asked to listen for the deepest meanings in what other people say.

We appear to be poor listeners for a number of reasons.

1. One reason is that listening is a complex activity. It involves hearing and interpreting the oral sounds and then organizing them in our mind for recall later. If an individual fails to function fully in any one of these aspects, the effectiveness of the listening is hindered. A person may not listen well because they do not attend to the communication, they may misinterpret the sender, or they may not be able to recall significant parts of the message.
2. The methods of collecting research data about listening may be providing us with inaccurate information. Pearson (1985) suggests that in most research there is a heavy reliance on a "lecture-test" method. People who appear to be good listeners are those who do well on paper-and-pencil tests assessing their recall of presented messages.
3. We are trained by our parents to be ineffective in listening. Parents quite often verbalize antilistening messages by suggesting that children not listen to someone or not to pay attention to someone who is talking. Parents also do not listen to the messages their children send and thus communicate that ineffective listening is acceptable.
4. Bolton (1979) suggests that students in a typical school receive antilistening training. Teachers are not always good listeners and the the typical learning situation is structured for a larger ratio of listening time than many human beings are capable of achieving.

Listening is an extremely important dimension of our vocational lives. Although it is important for all workers, for many of us it can make us or break us in our jobs. Let's look at the concept of listening from the counselor viewpoint.

The counselor is constantly involved in the process of listening. The messages sent by clients, both verbal and nonverbal, must be received, interpreted, and organized. Since listening is a covert process it is difficult to determine the accuracy of what the counselor assimilates as the client message. Any lapse in attending will result in a failure to receive all of the message. If the entire message is not received accurately, the counselor processes the message with incomplete data and can easily respond inaccurately as well as with bias. This difficulty with listening can also be compounded when the counselor lacks appropriate information about the client, such as, cultural background. The counselor may attend very well and receive client messages accurately but because of lacking cultural information, the counselor interpretes the message from their own cultural perspective. The resulting counselor response may be very inaccurate and remote in furthering the needs of the client. What happens is that the counselor chooses to hear what he/she wants to hear rather than the actual message that the client sent.

Counselors need to be active in listening to clients and critical in their analysis of the messages being transmitted. Active listening is generally considered to be listening with the total self. Counselors need to listen using all of their physical senses to tune into the client. The counselor's knowledge of the client concern, knowledge of client and counselor feelings, knowledge of culture and belief systems, and common sense enable the counselor to be a critical

listener. Critical listening facilitates the processing of the information received and analyzing the information as to its usefulness and validity.

Feedback is an important attribute of active listening. The giving and receiving of feedback, relative to the verbal and nonverbal messages transmited, allows the counselor to monitor the communication in the counseling relationship. The feedback may be either positive, a smile or nodding in agreement, or negative, a frown or lack of eye contact. Feedback may be given immediately or delayed, although immediate feedback tends to be more effective. Counselors also need to be aware that the feedback may be verbal or nonverbal and the client may be focusing on the counslors message just as the counselor focuses on the clients messages.

Feedback is a distinguishing characteristic of active listening. Feedback is defined as the verbal and nonverbal responses to a message, as these responses are received and understood by the speaker. Feedback allows you to monitor your communication with others. If you are effective in using and receiving feedback, you can avoid misunderstandings. Feedback may be differentiated on a number of dimensions. It may be positive or negative, immediate or delayed, verbal or nonverbal.

Although some research has been done in relation to gender differences and listening, the research evidence is inconclusive at this time as to whether males or females are better listeners. Some studies have indicated that there appears to be no significant differences in the listending skills of males and females (King, 1959; Buchli and Pearce, 1974). Other studies have reported that females

tend to be better than males at listening (Palamatier and McNinch, 1972). Other studies suggest that males are better than females at listening (Caffrey, 1955; Goldhaber and Weaver, 1972). The results of these studies do not offer inconclusive evidence that one sex is superior to the other in listening skills and probably should be questioned because:

1. Most of the studies relied on paper-and-pencil tests
2. There is no consistency in the populations used, some used elementary children, some high school students, and some college students.
3. From the counseling standpoint none of the studies focused on counselors.

Though neither sex may listen better, it appears that women and men listen differently. The difference appears to be in their attentional style. Weaver, (1972) indicates that men and women differ in their attentional styles in that men are "continually shaping, forming, observing, inquiring, and directing energy toward a chosen goal", whereas women attend more to the "relatedness of parts of a pattern, of intuitive perceptions of feeling situations, of openness of images of the unconsciousness as well as to the external environment".

From the counseling perspective this would seem to indicate that male counselors and clients alike tend to restructure messages in terms of their own goals. Thus, the male develops meaning from the message by restructure the message in his mind. The female focuses more on the pattern of the message and the relationships between various aspects of the message. Females tend to hear more of the message but are often distracted because they allow emotions to

influence their attention to some of the messages detail.

The following is an effective listening exercise designed to provide counselors with immediate feedback on their current listening strengths. After the script is read to counselors/prospective counselors, a series of questions are asked based on the script. This exercise is valuable in that it helps illustrate the continual need for the development of our listening capabilities.

EFFECTIVE LISTENING EXERCISE

Explain to the participants that a passage will be read to them about listening, the counselor, and the counseling relationship.

Script:

As we listen to clients or others talk, we hear all kinds of evidence that there are breakdowns in communication. We hear statements such as these:

a. "Why don't my clients listen to me?"

b. "My boss doesn't talk to me!"

c. "My friends never hear what I say!"

Being in the counseling profession, communication is what we should be experts in. Indeed, we may be more knowledgeable about current events and community interests than non-counselors. However, we still have communication pitfalls and one of these is listening. Research studies show that communication between counselor and client declines with time. Studies also suggest that continuing to talk together and listening to what each other says is important in maintaining a healthy counseling relationship in which both the counselor and the

client can grow. Counseling and communications experts have learned that a breakdown in communication between counselor and client is a factor in the failure of many counseling relationships. The durability and profitability of counseling relationships can be increased by improved sharing of concerns and listening. Each of us can improve in our ability to communicate with our clients, peers, boss, family and friends.

Studies show that of the four modes of communicating: reading, writing, speaking, and listening, people spend 75% of a typical day either speaking or listening. It has been noted that approximately 98% of learning in a person's lifetime is through the eyes and ears. Learning through the ears, or listening, takes up approximately 45% of that time. The problem is that people only hear about half of what has been said, and they tend to forget most of that.

End of script

A short discussion follows the reading of the script focusing on the following topics:

Ineffective listening can lead to:

a. misunderstandings
b. poor solutions
c. hurt feelings
d. loss of money
e. death
f. dissolved relationships

Mignon McLaughlin coined the following saying: "We hear only half of what is said to us, understand only half of that, believe only half of

that and remember only half of that". Putting this statement in context for this program: We could say that you will probably remember about 3 3/4 minutes of a typical one-hour program. After the short discussion a test is given to underscore the idea that we hear only 50% of what is said to us and remember less than that. Following are the four questions about the script just read.

At the beginning of the script, the statement was made that "as we listen to people talk, we hear all kinds of evidence that there are breakdowns in communication." Please write the answers to the following questions.

1. What was the first example statement presented which points out that there is a breakdown in communication?
2. Research indicates that communication between counselor and client tends to do what?
3. Durability of counseling relationships can be increased by _____ and _____.
4. What percent of our day is spent in speaking and listening?

If you had all been listening at your full potential you should have been able to answer every question, word for word. The answers to the four questions are:

1. Why don't my clients listen to me?
2. ....to decline with time.
3. sharing of concerns and listening.
4. approximately 75%

Many people feel threatened when asked to write answers down on a piece of paper. Many counselors may feel threatened about the kinds of things they have to deal with in a counseling situation. Clients

many times are able to sense that counselors are threatened. When this occurs communication and learning about that client is impeded. Therefore counselors may be using only 5% of our listening ability. You may wish to ask yourself the following questions: What type of client threatens you most? What happens to your communication? What happens to your listening?

After the Effective Listening Exercise has been completed and discussed, the participants have a tendency to feel more comfortable with each other. During this period of time several lecturettes which require some involvement of the group are undertaken. Activities/ lecturettes include proxemics, preferred in-take mode, and active listening and sending feeling messages.

PROXEMICS-SPATIAL NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS

Proxemics has to do with the personal cultural spaital needs of individuals and their interaction with their environmental space. What are violations of personal space?

A. Someone who stands to close

B. Someone borrowing something without asking

C. A counselor who may sit too close to a client

1. Patting the shoulder

2. Touching the hand

Requirements for personal space differ with cultures. In America there are four recognized zones of interaction:

A. Intimate zone - 0-2 feet

B. Personal zone - 2-4 feet

C. Social zone - 4-12 feet

D. Publ'c zone - beyond 12 feet

Language and spatial needs go hand in hand:

A. "Hello sweetheart" or "Gee, you been eating garlic again" (Intimate zone)

B. "How was your week" or "Tell me a little about yourself" (Personal zone)

C. "Hi" (Social zone)

D. "How do you do" - a more formal response (Public zone)

In order for counselors to be more effective with clients it may be a good idea to find out about their personal and cultural spatial needs which normally consist of:

A. Fixed territories

1. Violation of stationary boundaries like walls to your home or car
2. Would the client feel uneasy if someone came into their home without knocking?
3. How much value do you put on the wall that surround you?
4. Do you feel you have unseen but strong walls around your feelings?
5. How do you feel when someone tries to break those unseen walls? Violated? Defensive? Resentful? Or perhaps thankful?
6. What makes that wall important to you?
7. What about that wall is necessary?

B. Semi-fixed territories

1. Violations of semi-fixed territories include furniture, paintings, belongings, etc.

2. Would the client feel uneasy if someone borrowed or took something without asking?
3. Do you feel like you are always giving but recieve nothing in return?
4. Are you concerned about your ability or need to give of yourself?

Contact or non-contact person

When listening to a client you may wish to determine how he/she feels about being touched. Many people are unable to communicate or listen effectively unless they are being touched or are touching.

A. A "contact" person is one who likes to touch or be touched.

B. A "non-contact" person is one that does not touch others when stressing a point.

It's important for counselors to be able to determine their preference and respect those of others. Also, gently responding to those perferences so that we may determine why the client has a need to be touched or not to be touched.

PREFERRED IN-TAKE MODE

All of us take in and give out information differently:

Auditory person---An auditory person is one whose main mode of gathering information is through the ears. Listening is something that is enjoyed. When communicating with others, the word "hear", "tell", "sounds", and "listens". is used more than "see" and "feel".

Visual person---It is harder for this individual to learn new information through listening. Their main mode of communication both incoming and outgoing is through the eyes. When speaking the word

"see", "looks", "appears", "seems", and "clear" is used much more than "feel" and "hear".

Kinesthetic person---Listening may prove to be a time consuming, frustrating experience for this person. They are hands-on people who enjoy good manual dexterity. When speaking the word they use the most is "feel", "sense", "grasp", and "touch" rather than "hear" or "see". We as counselors can better assist our clients by being more alert to verbal cues as they relate to preferred in-take modes.

A. First, it is important as a counselor, to recognize the clients preferred in-take mode.

B. Second, blocks in communication occur with our clients because we, as counselors, either don't recognize our in-take mode or don't change our in-take mode for the client.

C. Third, communications experts contend that if we can recognize, by listening, the clients preferred in-take mode and change our pattern of responding to their pattern of responding our communication will be enhanced. Also, their ability to listen to us will be greatly increased.

ACTIVE LISTENING AND SENDING FEELING MESSAGES

Various ways of responding to people run the risk of communicating nonacceptance. To understand a persons point of view effectively it is necessary not to communicate nonacceptance. According to Gordon (1970) author of several books on active listening, most people,in a listening situation, commonly respond in

twelve different ways. These modes of response may communicate to the sender that it is not acceptable to feel the way he or she feels. If the client perceives one of these messages as indicating nonacceptance then:

1. There is a risk that he/she will become defensive about new ideas
2. He/she may be resistive to changing behavior
3. He/she may tend to justify certain feelings
4. He/she may turn silent because the listener is perceived as only passively interested in the sender

Responding to clients in one or more of these ways suggests to them that we are not listening and correctly processing their information. I have for you the twelve ways that we as counselors may communicate nonacceptance based on faulty listening

ORDERING, DIRECTING: "You have to ....."
WARNING, THREATENING: "You'd better not...."
PREACHING, MORALIZING: "You ought to....."
ADVISING, GIVING SOLUTIONS: "Why don't you...."
LECTURING, INFORMING: "Here are the facts...."
EVALUATING, BLAMING: "You're wrong...."
PRAISING, AGREEING: "You're right...."
NAME CALLING, SHAMING: "You're stupid...."
INTERPRETING, ANALYZING: "What you need...."
SYMPATHIZING, SUPPORTING: "You'll be ok...."
QUESTIONING, PROBING: "Why did you....."
WITHDRAWING, AVOIDING: "Let's forget it...."

CONCLUSION

Today's advanced technology requires that we become more in touch with our listening habits. Unfortunately, the more information that must be absorbed on a daily basis leads us to be very selective in what we choose to listen to. Counselors make a living listening and responding to our client population, therefore listening is as important to counselors as a scalpal is to a surgeon. Presented in this paper are ways in which we can train ourselves and assist prospective counselors with the use of listening as a skill

Also, presented in this paper is recent research on the listening habits of our client population and ourselves as counselors. Points presented include how misinterpretation affects our relationships, our early learning and its effects on listening, active listening, and gender differences in listening. The topics and lecturettes addressed in this paper may be used to increase the professionals awareness and the student's sophistication in the use of listening and communication as a therapeutic tool.

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